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- ART. VII.—1. *Sylla. Tragedie en Cinq Actes. Par E. Jouy, Membre de l'Institut. (Academie Française.)* Paris, 1822.  
2. *Catiline. A Tragedy in Five Acts. By the Rev. George Croly, A.M.* London, 1822.

WE have selected these two tragedies, the *Sylla* of Jouy, (the well known *Hermite de la Chaussée d'Antin*), and the *Catiline* of Croly, (the poet of 'Paris in 1815,') not only as the dramatic productions of two distinguished writers, but as affording each a characteristic, and we may add a favorable specimen of the present state of the art, both in France and in England.

It is a question of some interest, why the present century, which teems, especially in Great Britain, with literary talent in every department, and in none more than in serious poetry, should have done so little for the tragic drama; an age in which even prose may be said to be warm with the spirit of poetry; when fiction, rich with living pictures of man and nature, in all the varied extremities of worldly fortune, is daily, nay hourly, poured upon us: in which Scott, in strains of national enthusiasm, has so well recorded the superstitions, the feuds, the chivalrous character of his ancestors, and Byron has agitated the depths of the heart, with the most intense passion; whence is it that this age, in many other examples, so fruitful in nice yet fearless delineation of character and feeling, (the very elements of dramatic excellence,) can hardly produce one good tragedy—one, to which the present generation would willingly refer as a fair representative of their poetical merit, or to which they could refer with confidence, as likely to endure through all the caprices of literary and popular taste?

To whatever we are to attribute this deficiency, (the more remarkable as existing in that department of literature, which has been more successfully cultivated than any other,) the fact is certain, that in speaking of the English theatre, the thought turns to, and almost exclusively rests, on the glorious age of Elizabeth and James: while in the French drama, it ranges over a long reach of time, and the student is equally attracted by the chef d'œuvres of their three great dramatists, a period of a century and a half. Indeed the critics of their own nation are not yet agreed as to their relative merits; but it is

certain that in Corneille, Racine, and Voltaire is comprised all that is of great estimation in French tragedy, notwithstanding the volumes, the ‘magasin enorme d’ennui,’ which have issued from the press since the publication of the *Cid*. During this period, while the English drama has taken the passing impression of the times, more than any other species of their literature, as may be easily seen from the characteristics of its different epochs, the French has exhibited the same general invariable physiognomy, somewhat affected, it is true, by the existing state of society and the genius of the individual writer, but so little, in all its essential principles, that it may be truly regarded as the only thing in France, which still retains the features that it bore two centuries ago. We still find the same bigotted deference to their own unities, to proprieties of situation, to nice adjustment of plot, to all but development of character; to rules so multiplied and refined, that, as La Harpe and Voltaire repeatedly declare, the great triumph of a successful tragedy is in overcoming the toils thus woven about the genius of the poet, by the fastidiousness of their own critics.

In estimating the defects of the French theatre, and explaining their origin, too much stress, we think, is laid by some modern critics on their imitation of the Greek. We do not mean that they have not adopted the Greek tragedians as their models, which is incontestable, but that they have constructed their drama much more out of the elements of their own *national character*; the great pervading defect of which, at least as regards dramatic excellence, is a want of deep and genuine sensibility. However they may exhibit it in external form, they evidently have it not at heart: their whole history shows this. Of a lively, acute turn of mind, they have ever excelled in superficial portrait painting, memoirs, letter writing, and fashionable gossip; active and subtle in their perceptions of physical science; in the science of mind, ingenious, but speculative and sceptical; light, brilliant, and captivating—no where true to nature, no honest warmth, no tenderness of feeling. Hence they have no class of compositions, like the old English or Scottish ballads, breathing the devotedness of feudal heroism, or mourning over the disappointments of blighted love, or in deep sympathy with the secret beauties of nature. Hence the English poets generally most admired by them are

those abounding in dazzling and ostentatious periods, as Young, Thomson, &c. They have no sympathy for the sweet pastoral images so prodigally scattered throughout the minor poems of Spenser and Shakspeare, of Milton, or of Cowper. Hence in their drama, rhetoric takes place of action, style is more cultivated than thought, and the pomp of declamation is substituted for the vehement workings of passion. In short, all is artificial, yet all is French, and were it not too free a paradox, one might say, that art is natural to a Frenchman. Hence they have recourse to 'Rules' for want of an internal sense to regulate the measure of their sensibility. Life cannot be touched, blood cannot be shed upon the French stage: it would offend not their feeling, but their taste: of course the greatest opportunity for the display of the power of the Dramatist, the conflict of the last mortal agony, in short the most impressive exhibitions of passion, are sacrificed to theatrical squeamishness.\* Hence instead of studying *men*, their poets study the '*rules*;' the question, with them, is not what is natural, but what is agreeable; and things are not painted in the eloquent colors of actual life, the alternations of joy and sorrow, the contradiction of tumultuous passion, the bustle of jarring interests; but every thing is squared and levelled by the arbitrary code of critical etiquette.

A keen perception of the ridiculous is justly esteemed another source of their dramatic inferiority. We do not mean that satirical humor, so powerful an element in the English character, but that frivolous heartless disposition to turn every thing into a jest, which is the natural growth of a state of society where manners are the chief object of solicitude, and all is regulated by the ceremonies of courtly breeding. Nothing can be more fatal to high poetical enthusiasm. It is hardly credible to what extent this feeling prevails on the French theatre, and how much it has constrained their greatest masters, not only in the delineation of powerful excitement, but in the most insignificant particulars. Voltaire tells us that were the corpse of Cæsar, or of the son of Cato to be exhibited to the eye of the spectator as in the English tragedies,† where

\* It is however considered within the rules, for one of the French dramatis personæ to *kill himself*; a species of *denouement* of which their poets often avail themselves. This dispensation in favor of suicide shows a very curious state of sensibility.—See *Voltaire's Discours sur la Tragedie*.

† Since the time of Voltaire however they have grown to be less nice in the observance of this, and a few other inconsequential forms.

they give occasion to the most splendid effusion of the poet's eloquence, 'the pit would cry out, and the ladies turn away their heads in disgust;' and he adds, 'that the grotesque names of Pierre and Jaffier in Otway's *Venice Preserved*, (a play founded on the same historical facts with the *Manlius Capitolinus* of La Fosse,) would have been sufficient to have damned it with the polite audience of Paris!'

'L'Anglais dit tout ce qu'il veut, le Français ne dit que ce qu'il peut. L'un court dans une carrière vaste, et l'autre marche avec des entraves dans un chemin glissant et étroit.'

The French poet does indeed walk in fetters!

But although the French drama owes so much more, both of its excellencies and defects, to the national character than to any classical derivation, much of its permanent form must be attributed to the influence of the period and still more of the vigorous intellect, under which it was developed. French tragedy feels even to this day the impulse first given to it by the lofty genius of Corneille. Here we would observe, that we think too much account has been made of the *romantic* (in opposition to the classical) tendencies of his mind; and hence critics lament exceedingly the insurmountable opposition, which he experienced in communicating this free spirit to the national drama. But if, by *romantic*, he meant the exhibition of the manners, the sentiment, and character, growing out of the social relations, the religious and military institutions of the moderns, in contradistinction to those of the ancients; if this be intended by the epithet *romantic*, we have little reason to think it was his talent. That he was an admirer of the Spanish literature; that his first great tragedy was modelled upon the Spanish,—that he preferred the irregular sallies of Lucan and of Seneca, to the purer classics of the Augustan age: in fine, that he would have given greater scope to the limits of time and place, than suited the tyrannic genius of Richelieu and the academy, no one will deny, for all his compositions, both in prose and poetry, bear ample testimony to it. But here all tendency to the romantic ceases. His characters and his situations are not fashioned after any thing existing in his own time, but after the boldest ideal of Roman heroism. His women have none of the tenderness of female delicacy, none of the sweet courtesies of modern gallantry, or social refinement. We have nothing in detail, all is general and undefined,—sub-

lime and abstract sentiment, and splendid political dissertation. The man is lost in the statesman or the hero,—and private, individual feeling is swallowed up in the national. In fact, Corneille was an ancient, not of the Grecian, but of the Roman cast. Such an one, as, had he flourished in the last ages of the republic, would have created for them the national drama, which they so much wanted, building it upon the proud recollections of their heroic ancestors. Whenever he can indulge his natural vein, how does he triumph in this spirit of patriotism ; how does it blaze out in all his greatest productions, even in the romantic *Cid*, still more in *Cinna*, and more than all in the *Horace* : and we have always dwelt upon this last play with deeper interest, (although esteemed by the connoisseurs of his nation inferior to either of the others,) since it exhibits, on every feature, the seal of his peculiar genius. In all this, however, there is nothing of a romantic tendency, and according to our notions of it, but little of the dramatic. Indeed, he seems to have been designed by nature for a great epic poet ; and we have reason to regret that he did not cultivate this vein, instead of wasting the latter part of his life in fruitless attempts to rival the theatrical chef d'œuvres of his youth. But the times forbid it ; still he led the way where succeeding dramatists have followed, and had he flourished at an earlier period, in the days of Francis I, or of Henry IV, or any age of high-toned chivalry and romantic honor, with ‘ a charter free as is the wind,’ and a language as ripe for his purposes, as it was under the literary despotism of Richelieu and the academy, we do not believe that he would have given to French tragedy a more modern, romantic shape, or any materially differing from that in which he has now left it, elevated in majesty of sentiment to the height of his own genius, but accommodated in its essential costume to the genius of his countrymen. Nor do we believe that any other model could have endured in France.

Happier auspices attended the infancy and first bloom of the English drama, which, although emanating directly from the popular character, was yet fortunate in a period when that character was permitted to display itself in all its native raciness, neither depressed by the dull, assimilating forms of fashion, nor checked by any cold formula of critical anatomy. The last lingering of feudal heroism, and the dawn of modern

refinement ; when the rude spirit of the ‘olden time’ softening under the opening influence of taste and science, formed a singular union of knightly valor and lettered elegance in the young nobility, who were gathered round the court of a maiden queen. It was an age peculiarly adapted to all the purposes of poetry. The government of the kingdom, which in a preceding period had been divided among a factious aristocracy, was in its passage into the hands of the people arrested, and almost wholly concentrated in the persons of Elizabeth and her successor ; who, possessed of learning themselves, were the patrons of it in others. The magnificence of the royal festivals, where

‘ Throngs of knights and barons bold’

were met to grace the lists, and dispute the prize of chivalry, was well calculated to kindle even a torpid imagination ; but the beautiful fictions of Oriental mythology,\* which, floating down the stream of popular tradition, had gathered around almost every object in nature, clothing it in their own magical coloring, must have appealed yet more deeply to the sensibility of the poet. Every hill, and dale, grotto, and fountain,

‘ About whose flowery banks  
The nimble footed fairies danced their rounds  
By the pale moonshine,’

were alive with poetry. These delicate spirits of the moderns were more intimately blended with rural and domestic occupations than the sylvan deities of antiquity. They were also of a finer and more ætherial texture, couching in the cowslip’s bell, surfeiting on the honey of the rose, or decking the floweret with dewdrops. In contrast to these gossamer creations of a voluptuous Southern fancy, were those mysterious intelligencies, to whom the sad superstitions of the North had given

\* Whether these elfin superstitions were imported into England by the crusades, or (at an earlier period) by the conquering Saracen into Spain, and thence diffused through the rest of Europe, we believe it is now pretty generally agreed, that they owe their existence to the luxuriant invention of the East. Scott, who gathers flowers of poetry even from the dreary walks of the antiquary, beautifully derives the *Fairies* from the *Peris* of Persian mythology ; spirits who to the moral purity of our angels, superadd the personal graces of the Mahometan Hourî. The conjecture is the more plausible, since the Arabians, (the only Eastern people with whom the Europeans had any intercourse) were very familiar with the Persian romances, and as they have no letter *P* in their alphabet, the word *Peri* would, without violence in their enunciation, be converted into *Fairy*.—*Vide Essay on Fairies of Popular Superstition.*

an undefined control over the elements of nature and over the destinies of man ; who, affecting the imagination through the terror of these mystical attributes, were of a more truly poetical complexion than the Eumenides of the ancients, which addressed themselves, directly, as it were, to the physical senses, in the fears which they inspired of their savage temper and hideous personal deformity. But if these shadows of superstition, not yet scattered by the lights of philosophy, gave to the age a rich illusive coloring of poetry, the state of society was peculiarly favorable to the purposes of the dramatic poet. Men were not constrained in the polished fetters of ceremony ; neither was there that feeling of equality prevalent among them, produced by the general diffusion of knowledge and wealth, the former of which state of things is as destructive of individuality of character, as the latter of ideal elevation, and both of which are fatal to high poetical enthusiasm. In the chivalry that graced the court of his sovereign, the poet could find more than one model of a ‘preux chevalier ;’ but his tribunal, fortunately for the English drama, was not so much the court as the people, who refused their applause to characters and sentiments not founded in simple intelligible nature. For this reason, the object with the old English dramatists was not as with the French, to picture some model of ideal excellence, and to produce one consistent harmonious impression, but to give a faithful transcript of nature ;—nature in all her nakedness and variety of passion.—In short, they were to please an audience who acknowledged no ‘rules’ but those of nature,—who decided from feeling, not from taste. The English are accused by their politer neighbors of betraying a want of sensibility, in the pleasure they take in cruel heart-rending catastrophes ; but in our opinion this is rather an evidence of sensibility, which, when excited, follows up without debate, the enthusiastic conceptions of the poet ; and the less there is of genuine feeling in a people the more will they be disposed to hesitate, interposing the frigid rules of taste, and proscribing, as extravagant, emotions in which they cannot sympathise.

The principle, then, on which the old English Drama was bottomed, and which marks it from that of every other nation, was *veracity* ; manifesting itself in the compositions of the inferior dramatists of that fruitful period, by the wonderful accuracy of detail and freshness of coloring, with which the whole



material and visible world is expressed ; and in those of the higher order, by the intrepid and profound views which they every where afford of the hidden heart, and mysterious character of man. The ill digested plays of the former class teem with pictures of whatever is lovely, and revolting in nature—the opening bloom of beauty, and the loathsomeness of corruption—all are sketched with a graphical fancy, to which even the rankness of the theme seems to add fresh luxuriance. In the higher order of poets, such as Beaumont and Fletcher, Massinger and Jonson, this same principle of veracity is shown in their deep but literal views of character, their clear expositions of all its secret windings, the unshrinking fearlessness with which they follow it into every extremity of passion and agony ; nay, devising the most extravagant situations, for its better development, and then copying it in all its frightful details. Like the Italian painter, who, we are told, tortured a criminal to death, by stabbing him repeatedly, but at slow intervals, with his own hand, transferring upon his canvass each new expression of anguish that lighted up the countenance of his victim. Although these situations are often forced and extravagant, yet the characters are always true to the situations, acting precisely as such men in life would have acted under such circumstances ; in this respect, being directly the reverse of the French school, who are as precise in the proprieties of situation, as they are loose and indefinite in discrimination of character.

It is not our intention to go into an analysis of the dramatic genius of an age, whose merits and defects have of late years been abundantly discussed ; the laborious editions of commentators have put it into the power of every man to decide in this matter for himself. These editions have not circulated very extensively in this country ; but we know not whether this is a subject of regret, as with their many beauties is mingled such a strain of earthly sensuality, as must have prevented their reception upon any stage, but one where both the players and the audience were protected by masks, as was the case at least with the female spectators in Queen Elizabeth's days ; a stain which no art can wholly purge away, since, (as has been well remarked,) it is not, as in Shakspeare, a casual excrescence on the surface, but deeply ingrained into the body of the piece.

Without enlarging, then, upon the peculiar excellencies of these masters of the art, all of them concentrated, in a greater or less degree, in our divine Shakspeare, to whom these other stars repaired

‘ To fill their urns with golden light,’

we will only remark, first, that their neglect of all dramatic rules, must have been a matter of calculation with them, as best hitting the genius of the times, since many of them were accomplished scholars, and enjoyed therefore all the lights of Aristotle and the schools ;—secondly, that they show perpetually both in the spirit of their characters, and their rich, natural imagery, how deeply they are indebted to the national ballads, those simple chronicles, which, emanating from the feelings and customs of the country, bear all the raciness and freshness of the productions of a virgin soil. In Fletcher and Shakspeare this is more discernible than in any of the others, and they alone have painted in all the sweetness of their old traditional poetry, that tender, uncomplaining, broken-hearted love, which seems to throw a sort of mournful radiance around its object,

‘ Carrying with it an infectious grief  
That striketh all beholders :’

A character growing out of that deep and melancholy temperament not uncommon with the English, and nourished perhaps by their gloomy atmosphere, and the soft tranquil complexion of their rural scenery ; a character to which we find nothing similar in the compositions of the Greeks or French. Antigone and Zaire come the nearest to it of any that we recollect ; but the fascination of the Antigone of Sophocles is owing to filial tenderness, and that of Zaire to a certain open *naïveté*, bearing little resemblance to the deep suppressed feeling, which, ‘ like the worm in the bud,’ preys on ‘ the damask cheek,’ the more for its concealment. Fletcher seems to have possessed a more genuine poetical sensibility than any of his rival contemporaries, and in his *Sad Shepherdess*, has ‘ extracted all those liquid sweets’ of English verse, which Milton, with more chastity but a less luxuriant hand, has borrowed and transfused into his *Comus*.

Shakspeare’s Historical Dramas (no less than his Romantic,) in the glimpses which they every where afford of the feudal spirit of the ‘ olden time,’ yet living in the romantic songs of

his country, show how deeply he drank of these fountains of simple melody, which gushing, as it were, fresh from the heart, were much better suited to his purposes than the worn cisterns of ancient literature. Upon so trite a theme as Shakspeare, we will detain our readers by one or two observations only. It has been disputed whether his compositions breathe more of a melancholy or of a cheerful temperament. Foreign critics impressed with the wild sublimity of his imagination, and the sanguinary catastrophes in many of his tragedies, (to some of which his French translators have very injudiciously given a fortunate termination,) are of the former opinion; while his own countrymen dwelling on his unrivalled characterisations of a national humor, which they only can appreciate, have imputed to him a joyous and social disposition. There is however, we think, another trait of character conspicuous over both these, though almost always mingled with them in a greater or less degree; we mean a disposition to sarcasm—not the sarcasm of chill misanthropy, (as with Byron,) nor of a splenetic querulous temper, but of one who has such a deep insight into the hypocrisies of the heart, such a vivid perception of the vanities of all things human, that he cannot help giving vent to it in the fulness of his feeling, which accordingly he does more or less in all his leading portraits; in the moralizing vein of Jaques,—the facetious, but not less philosophical reveries of Falstaff,—or the shrewd raillery of Falconbridge;—and in a more serious tone, in the bitter heart wrung expostulations of Richard II, of Wolsey, and of Timon of Athens on the treachery of man, and the emptiness of earthly grandeur—in the cold sneers of Iago and of Richard III triumphing in their villany;—in the caustic bitterness of the fool in Lear;—of Edgar, and of Lear himself in the insanity of grief,—and in Hamlet every where. Here too we may find a reason why Shakspeare did not mould his characters after an ideal standard of beauty, as in the ancient and the French drama. He was too profound a philosopher, too knowing in all the fallacies and imperfections even of the most faultless, to impose either upon us or himself a model of imaginary perfection. And although foreign critics, among the rest Schlegel, his brilliant and enthusiastic commentator, pronounce the ‘beau idéal,’ where ‘each conception is a heavenly guest,’ to be the highest object and triumph of the poet, far beyond the literal imitation of human character, we cannot but think that

the power of combining, as in real life, divine elevation of sentiment with the impurities of our earthly nature, shows a wider range of genius, and is of a far more practical and moral influence. If the critics are against us in this opinion, both Homer and Shakspeare are for us, and we may add to these names the great prose dramatist of our own day, who, in his complicated portraits has, like his divine prototype, exhibited equally their strength and their infirmities, perpetually disclosing the weak points, the *mortality*, as it were, of the characters which most command our admiration. This principle of Shakspeare may in a great measure explain and apologize for the deficiency often imputed to him, of a direct obvious moral resulting from the disposition of events in his tragedies, since the very exhibition of the contending motives of vice and virtue, as they are working in the bosoms of his agents, and the mental disquietude and torture occasioned by such contention, make each one of his dramatis personæ carry, as it were, a warning and a moral in his own person.

The deep spirit of feeling and of reflection, which had been the source of so much power and beauty in English poetry, settling into the sour fanaticism of the republic, entirely blighted these sweet and early blossoms of dramatic excellence. Even if the prejudices of this remarkable, but bigotted age, had not abolished theatrical exhibitions, the spirit in which they must have been conceived, would have been incompatible with their permanent success. The inspired doctrines of Christianity, however suited to some other kinds of poetry, are in their essence unfit for the dramatic. We revolt at the notion of bringing invisible deity and the awful mysteries of the Christian faith, in contact with our visible and ordinary concerns; and an enlightened taste is shocked at the profane familiarity with which they are personified in the ancient ‘Mysteries and Moralities.’ Moreover the omnipotence of such an agency, whatever dignity it may give to the subject, entirely destroys its interest as a drama, since there can be no uncertainty as to the disposition of events, where man is enlisted on the one side, and God on the other.

‘*Victrix causa Deis placuit, sed victa Catoni.*’

This was sublime with the ancients, but would be blasphemy and nonsense with the moderns. For this reason, we

have never taken that delight in the *Athalie* of Racine, faultless though it be in sentiment and eloquence of diction, that we have in some other of his compositions, where human passions and counsels are left to contend with each other in their unaided and uncontrolled vigor. Indeed the theme is almost too oppressive for any species even of narrative poetry, and although it fired the glorious muse of Milton to an unrivalled sublimity, yet it has left the divine epic open to the imputation of coldness and severity.

It is usually said that English poetry took the French costume in the effeminate reign of Charles II. But this is anticipating the period of the full influence of the French, at least, in relation to the drama. The subtleties of their criticism were not then quite as wire-drawn, as at the latter part of the reign of Louis XIV. It was rather a period in which the elements of the old English spirit were contending for mastery with those of the French, and the bloated heroics of Dryden, and the stilted eloquence of Lee, had, after all, more of English impurity than of French artifice in the complicated extravagance both of their machinery and their characters; and Otway, the romantic and tender Otway, was undeniably in faults as in beauty, a delicate copy of the elder school.

Without however dwelling on the peculiarities of an age, whose best dramatic productions were but the faint lingerings of a brighter day, we will only add, that a good commentary on the taste of the times may be gathered from the well known fact, that four only of Shakspeare's Plays, were revived at the close of Charles II's reign; two of these, 'Macbeth and the Tempest, having been metamorphosed into operas, and accommodated with new scenes, machinery, flyings for witches, singing, dancing,' &c. 'still,' continues the *Roscius Anglicanus*, 'proved lasting plays!'

The proper æra of the consummation of a foreign influence in dramatic criticism was in the reign of Queen Anne, when Pope and Addison introduced a system of poetical taste, which had been perfected in the polite court of Louis XIV, and which controlled the serious drama in England for the greater part of the last century. The jealousies of political faction, which had distracted the kingdom during the regency of the Queen Mother, were harmonized under the courtly administration of Louis XIV, and the French drama, in common with every

other species of literature, felt the influence of the new state of things, though in all essential points remaining true to the immutable basis of national character on which it rested. The age of chivalry had given way to one of refined gallantry ; patriotism had subsided into loyalty ; and the heroic spirit of the knight, into the courteous breeding of the gentleman. Louis XIV, that 'great actor of majesty,' if not possessed of supreme abilities in himself, had at least the power of discerning and commanding them in others ; and by the splendor of his conquests, both in the arts of war and of peace, has made his reign a bye-word of excellence in French history. Beauty and wealth and talent, all attracted by the blaze of royal munificence, moved around a system, of which the grand monarch was the centre and animating principle. Every thing had reference to majesty, and the modish etiquette of court ; and the drama, the peculiar subject of its patronage, was even more cramped in this 'golden hoop' of ceremony, than it had been under the iron yoke of scholastic pedantry, imposed by the academy.

These times were extremely favorable to the full expansion of a genius like Racine's, which might have wanted sufficient energy to brave the rude and stormy period of Corneille. Flexible, elegant, and always proper,—moving without effort under the tyranny of the rules,—overflowing with passionate tenderness,—above all, dainty to a degree unknown in any other country in choice of phraseology, and sweet even to cloying in the unbroken melody of his verses, his beauties were precisely those of a cultivated epicurean circle, with whom grace was more essential than vigor, taste than feeling, and harmony of language, than originality or depth of thought. Still the drama remained in all its essential principles as national as in the time of Corneille, and although the graceful genius of Racine borrowed its fire from the very altars of the Grecian muse, and his chef d'œuvres are almost paraphrases of Euripides, yet in their spirit they have little resemblance to Greek tragedy. His characters, as is well known, are as much after the French cut as those of Corneille are of the Roman, and with the *perruque* and *chapeau bordé*, the theatrical costume of the day, have put on the equally modish costume of the prevailing sentiments. One great cause of the popularity of Racine was, as we have observed, the exquisite finish of his versification, into whose

whose secret charms their commentators seem to have pryed with the very microscope of criticism, pointing out and magnifying a thousand beauties, imperceptible to the eye of a foreigner. As these subtle beauties are not only untranslatable, but can never be properly relished by any but a native, Racine, though the most popular of the French dramatists in his own country, has perhaps fewer admirers out of it than either of his two great competitors.

We agree with those, however, who consider the example of Racine to have had, after all, less influence in forming even the dramatic taste of the age, than the imposing precepts of Boileau. This eminent author obtained an influence altogether disproportioned to his merits. Far inferior in depth of sagacity and in acuteness of wit to Horace or to Pope,—without a true relish for the highest beauties of his art, but with an exquisite scent in detecting its smallest blemishes,—with a light vein of raillery polished into the poetry of language, not of sentiment,—he has by a compilation of critical *dicta*, from the writings of the ancients and the prejudices of his own countrymen, and by condensing them into the brilliant and sententious pomp of French Alexandrine, digested a code of paramount authority in all the courts of criticism in his own nation; and which, through the interpretation of the wits of queen Anne's day, controlled the dramatic literature in England for the greater part of the following century. The influence of this system was to refine upon the precision of the ancient rules. The laws of the unities were consolidated into one memorable couplet. The old peculiarities of the French school were more strongly insisted on than ever. The poet, says Boileau,

‘ Orne, élève, embellit, agrandit toutes choses ;’

all, therefore, was splendid, imposing, and rhetorical; reason took place of imagination, and cold correctness of free and lofty enthusiasm. In short, it was a system, which, with all its studied accuracy, leaves the heart unsatisfied, showing that in poetry, at least, faultlessness is one thing and perfection another.

A sensible critic will have a much wider influence in determining the tastes of men, than a poet of a far loftier genius in any other walk than that of criticism. The poet, addressing himself to the enthusiasm or the sensibilities of his readers,

finds sympathy only in a few ; the critic appeals to reason, and is comprehended by all ; the inspirations of the former may delight, but the arguments of the latter will convince. The poet teems with imagery—sentiment—fleeting beauties, which, touching the heart rather than the understanding, quickly *pass away* ; the critic digests from all these his axioms, and, delivering them with authority, they are taken up, and *retained* in the memory. For this reason the didactic poetry of Boileau and of Pope has had a greater influence in determining the permanent tastes of their respective nations, than the sublime inspirations of Corneille and of Milton.—The French critic complains of the tyranny of rhyme :

‘ Maudit soit le premier, dont la verve insensée,  
 Dans les bornes d’un vers renferma sa pensée,  
 Et, donnant à ses mots une étroite prison,  
 Voulût avec la rime enchaîner la raison.’

It was a great mistake in him ; for rhyme, at least the English and French heroic measure, seems to be as peculiarly well adapted to didactic subjects, as it is ill suited to all the higher kinds of poetry,—of feeling and fancy. The antithetical structure of the couplet, one line of which is mathematically set against the other, is favorable to brilliant emphasis and satirical contrast ; and in the simultaneous termination of sense and sound, each distich forms in itself a complete whole—something portable, as it were, that may be carried off and laid up independently in the memory. How many of the brilliant axioms, struck out by the vivacity of Boileau and of Pope, are treasured up in the recollection of every one, but which might have escaped and run to waste in the diffusive wilderness of our blank verse !

Much of the influence of Boileau, however, on dramatic, as on other poetry, must be attributed to the predispositions of his own countrymen ; that of Pope, on the other hand, chiefly to his own genius. The soil had indeed been prepared for the reception of an exotic taste, but had the seed fallen under any other cultivation than that of Pope or of Addison, it might never have struck such deep root into a foreign mould, as to produce after harvests of the same stock for nearly a century. Of these two illustrious men, Pope, although no dramatic writer, like Addison, must be considered, by his general authority as a poet and a critic, to have had the greatest influence in diverting his



countrymen from the study of those models of theatrical excellence, which flourished in the days of Elizabeth and her successor, to that of the 'rules' and the elaborate mechanism of the new school; in bringing the Muse, who had before sported in the capricious and unreprieved liberty of a mountain nymph, into the circle of fashion, and instructing her to move there, with the brilliant decorum of a studied and heartless formality.\*

Addison had certainly a more genuine sensibility to natural beauty than our great moral poet. This is shown abundantly in his eloquent prose compositions; especially in the delicacy with which he brought to light the neglected charms of Milton, and in the commendations which he paid to the unpretending and antiquated beauties of the glorious old ballad of Chevy Chase;—commendations, which in that age of conventional refinement, he dared not to venture upon without a suitable apology. His sweet and unaffected graces, however, seem to desert him, whenever he ventures into the company of the muses. All then is stately, showy, and uninteresting. The success of his *Cato*, which exhibited all the peculiarities and many of the excellencies of French tragedy, was the triumph of the new school of criticism. The French connoisseurs hailed it as the dawn of a purer taste in their neighbors. Voltaire politely compares its author to the czar Peter introducing civilization into the Russias; and takes occasion to regret that Shakspeare had not been reserved for the enlightened days of Addison. Heaven be praised that he was not. For then the premature lament of the good bishop Corbet on the flight of the fairies, had been in truth realized; and with the beautiful illusions of

\* Pope's edition of Shakspeare is but another evidence of his artificial judgment, and of his distaste for the free spirit of the ancient theatre. The qualities in the great dramatist, which he most strongly eulogises, are those of the philosopher rather than of the poet, and he perpetually shows a disposition to apologise for his author's nonconformity to the severe classical system introduced by Ben Jonson. But a man's peculiar taste is more likely to be disclosed in the freedom of familiar conversation, than in set literary performances, where he must temper it in some measure to the public standard. The late publication of Spence's *Anecdotes of his Contemporaries* shows the natural vein of Pope in a still clearer light, than his printed compositions. 'It was mighty simple in Rowe,' says he, 'to write a play professedly in Shakspeare's style, that is, professedly in the style of a bad age.' An age, indeed, which, as has been said of the age preceding, (in every thing relating to the drama,) was to his 'Hyperion to a Satyr!' We say nothing of his singular condemnation of blank verse, and his equally remarkable eulogium on Rymer, 'the best of English critics,' who deliberately discussed and censured the plays of Shakspeare by the rules of Aristotle.

rural mythology, had vanished also much of the romantic sweetness and untutored graces of the old English poetry. Rowe had not sufficient intrepidity or vigor to turn the tide of modern criticism, although gifted with a vein of more natural feeling; and most of the succeeding attempts in the serious drama, down to the Irene of Dr Johnson, that last solid monument of French architecture, were more or less the growth of this classical school; to which many of the authors, as Theobald, Mallet, Glover, Mason, &c. scholars by profession, and tinctured with the pedantry of learning, were still farther led by the superiority of their knowledge of books to that of men; most of whose dramatic productions, not resting on the sure basis of national character, are now banished from the stage, and quietly gathered to the dust of the library.

While English tragedy was thus in a manner denationalized, the French remained true to the nice laws and primitive principles, by which it had been regulated in the days of Corneille, and this too, while the philosophy of the eighteenth century was urging its adventurous wing into every region of free inquiry, throwing off, one after another, the restraints of religion, and law, and education;—a strong evidence how deeply, (in spite of classical pretension,) the French drama was founded in the enduring elements of the national character. Still, however, it caught something of the impression of the time from the versatile talents of Voltaire; but in no greater degree than would be naturally stamped upon every walk of science by the march of a great and independent genius. Inferior to Corneille in sublimity and Roman majesty of sentiment,—to Racine in the chastised expression and Attic grace of his eloquence, he surpassed them both in a variety and flexibility of mind, which, putting off the stiffened robe of antiquity, accommodated itself to a modernised and more liberal costume. He had, besides, what was rare with his countrymen, cultivated a knowledge of the literature of England, and during his residence in that country had particularly devoted himself to the study of its greatest dramatic genius, whose sublime compositions he has so often parodied in translation, censured in criticism, and imitated, (not to say pilfered,) in his plays. With these resources of genius and study, he gave to the French theatre a wider range of subject, drawing it from the eternal themes of Greek and Roman story, to more modern ground, and he moreover

infused into it an engaging *naïveté*, a simplicity of feeling, much more touching than the vehement tenderness of Racine, or the mawkish sensibility of his imitators. But this was all ; and although he was the master spirit of that philosophy,

‘ Which, like the wind,  
Blew where it listed, laying all things prone,’

and one who did more than all his compeers to shake the pillars of social order, yet the moment he enters upon the drama, he surrenders himself without a struggle to all the fine web, which has been wound about it by the contrivance of criticism since the days of Richelieu. The source of this seeming paradox, both in himself and in his nation, is the vanity and the want of genuine feeling, which, while it has led them in metaphysics and morals to surpass every other people in the extravagance of their speculations, has also led them, in the drama, to exceed all others in the invention of arbitrary and self-constituted refinements ; thus making success in both the triumph of art and not of nature.

There can be no better evidence of the hopelessness of an attempt to infuse any thing of the English temper into French tragedy, than is exhibited in the pieces which Ducis has paraphrased from Shakspeare, which he has made popular with his countrymen by striking out all the individual and national physiognomy of the great poet, and melting it down into one uniform and splendid mass of French declamation. In his preface to his *Macbeth*, one of these most successful paraphrases, he tells us, that ‘ he has done his best to obliterate that revolting impression of horror, which would certainly have ruined his piece on the polite theatre of Paris !’ This to the audience of Crebillon ! But Crebillon raved within the rules. In his design it must be confessed Ducis has succeeded to a miracle ;—effacing at a *coup de pinceau*, all that supernatural agency, that mysterious, irresistible destiny, which, like that of the ancient Greeks, seems throughout this drama to bear on its bosom the whole tide of events, showing that our divine poet was as deeply penetrated with the solemn spirit of the North, as in some other of his plays, with the lighter fictions of Fairy land. In his ‘ *Othello*,’ Ducis makes a similar apology to his courtly audience for the ‘ extreme villany’ of Iago’s character, which he endeavors, in compassion to their feelings, to disguise till the last act. But the Willow song

was the touch-stone to French sensibility ; and it is accordingly set to music à la *Parisienne*, and accompanied by Desdemona on the guitar ! The guitar was indispensable to the effect. At the end of the play we have a full length portrait of the same song ; or, as Mons. Ducis terms it, the Romance of the Willow, for the ‘ particular benefit,’ as he with much *nai-veté* informs us, of all mechancholy ladies, ‘ femmes tendres et mélancoliques, qui trouveront du plaisir à la chanter dans la solitude. Elles pourront s’accompagner avec la guitare, la harpe ou le clavecin, sur lesquels il sera très aisé de transporter la musique de M. Grétry !’ This is the precise difference between French and English sensibility. Shakspeare thus *desossé* and well garnished moreover with smooth and honeyed versification has been made palatable to the dainty audience of Paris ; a circumstance which shows more than any disquisition on the subject, that English tragedy can never infuse its spirit into, and obtain the same influence over the French, that the latter has had over the English, since the peculiarities of the French, consisting rather in outward and superficial form are more easily communicated than the deep inward tone of energy and feeling, which constitutes the peculiar essence of the English.

From the preceding long, and, we fear, tedious sketch, in which it has been our object not to examine into so stale a topic as the character of the French and English dramas, but to point out the sources of that character and the principal external circumstances that have affected it ; it is evident that French tragedy, notwithstanding its classical pretensions, is no less strictly national, no less intimately derived from the peculiar dispositions of the people, than the English ; and in the progress of its spontaneous development, has been much less modified either by domestic or foreign influences. For the future there can be no reason to anticipate a more liberal or indeed any other constitution of their drama. In its ancient state it has survived the convulsions of a revolutionary age ; and the most eminent tragedies of the last fifty years, which have endured as legitimate and classical productions, are of the old regime, differing only in a few unessential particulars. A bolder spirit both of composition and criticism has been attempted and maintained with ardor, but never enjoyed more than a temporary success. France, or more properly Paris, the reservoir of dramatic talent probably experiences as little as any place

the influence of the coarse, commercial business-spirit of modern times, which might, sooner or later, wear away some of the artificial refinements naturally cherished by a people devoted to pleasure or to science.

Poetry too seems to be less esteemed in France than it was a century ago, and to have been gradually yielding to prose the same supremacy which it acquired at the early period of the literature. 'Beau comme de la prose,' says La Harpe, came to be a common expression in the middle of the last century. Fontenelle and La Motte disparaged verse in deliberate criticism; Montesquieu, in his popular Persian letters; and Buffon, who breathed the very 'air of passionate thought,' affected to undervalue it in his conversation. Both the last writers, and Rousseau more than all, by that 'heavenly hue of words,' which they threw around every object that they touched, thus disembodying poetry of its very spirit, gave to prose a decided and a permanent ascendancy which has been maintained for it to the present day in the polished rhetoric of La Harpe, the enthusiasm of Chateaubriand and de Stael, and the calm flexible eloquence of Jouy. Indeed the light, ambitious, dazzling qualities of the French character, seem to be better adapted to the cold rhetorical blazonry of prose; while the reserved temper, the deep and passionate sensibility of the English, naturally seeks the warm mystical coloring of poetry. And so far has this peculiar adaptation been understood and cherished by each nation, that the scope allowed to prose writing in France, is as much superior to that accorded to it in England, as that conceded to poetry is inferior;\* and a literal translation of the gorgeous eloquence of the French orator would seem even more extravagant to a British ear, than the rapt enthusiasm of the English bard to the precise and prosaic Frenchman.

The reverse of all this seems to have been going on in Great Britain, during the present century of brisk intellectual activity, in which poetry breaking through the chilling atmosphere of French criticism, has shone out with its natural warmth, if not with its earliest brightness. Indeed, it seems to have penetrated far into other regions of literature, and the press is daily teeming with productions, which, though without the drapery of verse, are alive with the genuine breath of poetry. The revival of an acquaintance with the old national ballad, and

\* See *Mad. de Stael de la Literature*. Tom. 1. ch. 16.

the romantic minstrelsy of the country, through the labors of Dr Percy, (who, both an antiquary and a poet, appreciated their virtues,) and through the diligence of succeeding critics down to the illustrious antiquarian poet of the present day, has been correctly pointed out as a chief cause of this return to old English feeling and freedom, after the lapse of a century. Cowper set the example of a truly natural and homebred taste ; and some of the most eminent writers of our own time have indulged this simple vein to an extreme which savours of insipidity and coarseness. It has been well said by the critics, that in the poetry of Queen Elizabeth's day, in Shakspeare, and still more in Spenser, the Gothic spirit of the middle ages predominated over the classical spirit of antiquity. As truly may it be said that in the days of Queen Anne, precisely the reverse of this took place, while in our age the influence of both one and the other, the Teutonic and the classical have yielded to the higher inspirations of Christianity. This is discernible in the compositions of most of our truly great contemporary poets. One exception do we now recall,—one whose lips have uttered the sublimest inspirations, though touched with no spark from heaven.

In this renovation of genuine poetical feeling, how is it that the drama, once the glory of British literature, should be now almost a blank. The poetry is burning with passion and overflows with deep and tender sentiment—fancy is ever on the wing, and novels, tales, and romances, rich in conceptions of character, have become the ordinary and expected nourishment of this thrice happy age. These are the elements of dramatic excellence,—yet there is no drama.

The causes of this deficiency, we think, are to be found, first, in the peculiar temper of the writers of the present age, and secondly, in that of the age itself. In most of the modern poets we may observe, that the pervading and animating principle is egotism. Their muse no longer goes abroad in the social temper of their ancestry, into the dwellings of other men, but clings to the bosom of its votary, brooding over his peculiar passions and feelings, exhibiting these, it is true, in all the nakedness of their beauty and deformity, but these only—in short, self, either directly or indirectly, engrosses the author, and is presented under every possible aspect to the reader. Is he of a benevolent and Christian temper like Wordsworth, it gushes

forth from the heart upon every occasion however trivial, on every object that he encounters in his path—a ‘donkey’ or a ‘daisy,’ an ‘abbey’ or a ‘washing-tub,’ no matter what, the thing is of no importance in itself, as it is soon lost in the flowerings of the poet’s fancy, exhibiting only the hues of his individual sentiments. Winckelman observes, that the ‘poetry of the North, though rich in imagery, furnishes few images for the pencil of the artist.’ This remark, which applies yet more forcibly to modern poetry, is founded on the same causes which make it essentially undramatical, viz.—that instead of the plain naked grouping of men and nature as existing in themselves, we have them in the delusive and uniform coloring of the poet’s peculiar fancy and temper. The method of description rather by the impressions an object excites, than by a picture of the object itself, is genuine poetry, and of the highest order; but it is not dramatic poetry. And in this the writers of our day differ from those of the olden time, both of them the disciples of nature, but the former picturing every object in the solitary and monotonous hues of their own feelings, while the latter, like theameleon, take the shifting colors of every object that is touched by them. This is the spirit of the dramatic, which, entering into the concerns, the prejudices, the motley characters of men, takes and gives again the very ‘body and pressure of the time.’ Such is not the spirit of lord Byron’s muse. His egotism, indeed, not content with turning up and revealing to the public gaze the fearful depths of a vexed and tumultuous spirit, proudly disclaims all communion with mankind.

‘From my youth upwards  
My spirit walked not with the souls of men.  
\* \* \* \*

I stood  
Among them, but not of them; in a shroud  
Of thoughts, which were not their thoughts.’

How can such an one enter the lists as a dramatic writer! Accordingly, his favorite character bears one general complexion of fierce, God-forsaking, man-despising independence, which, seeking, as it were in despite, the solitude of the wilderness, ‘a sharer in its fierce and far delights,’ peoples it with the affections that would have been better expended upon humanity. All this exasperated sensibility, it is true, is the source of the highest music of poetry. But there can hardly be imagined a constitution of mind less adapted to dramatic eminence.

Another evidence of the want of dramatic temper in the living writers, is their frequent indulgence in abstract speculation spun out into metaphysical or moral subtleties, which, in the metaphorical dress of verse, are not always intelligible, and are directly opposite to the distinct, imitative, practical spirit of the dramatist. But after all, the original cause of the present humble condition of the stage is to be referred to the character and peculiar circumstances of the age we live in. In the days of Elizabeth and James, the lower classes of the people resorted to the theatres with a zeal that can only be attributed to the novelty of the spectacle, which, as they were illiterate, little versed in any history, but such as had wandered down in the uncertain stream of oral tradition, and moreover half impressed with a belief in the supernatural creations of the poet, must have taken a more powerful hold of their eager imaginations, than we can well realize in the present day of enlightened scepticism. The nobility and higher ranks, for the most part bred to arms, had little to do with the intrigues of fashionable or literary life, but sought their amusements in the pageantry of public festivals,—the tournaments, the masques, and the theatres. In our day all this is altered; the general distribution of knowledge, of wealth, and civil privileges has levelled, or rather exalted men to an equality, which, by obliterating in some measure the varieties of condition and character, is unfavorable to the purposes of the dramatist; the bustling, matter-of-fact, and wordly spirit of trade has closed their hearts against the delusive fictions of the poet;—and finally the advancement of domestic refinements disposes them to seek their happiness in the quiet independence of their own firesides.

But the greatest discouragement to dramatic effort is in a deeper cultivation of the better classes, who, more or less accomplished in liberal studies, and in the habit of exercising their own intellectual taste, no longer go abroad to get instruction from the poet, as in the days of queen Bess, when, as the author seldom printed his plays, the theatre was the only volume in which to study him. He is now taken into the retirement of the closet, where he can indulge, secure of the sympathy of his refined reader, more unreservedly in the exhibition of his own personal feeling, than he could in the presence of a motley audience, whose coarse, contradictory passions are to be stirred only by the exhibition of the chequer-



ed scenes and characters of real life. To these causes we may, in a great degree, refer the present humble condition of the English drama ; and as they are likely to continue, we have no reason to anticipate the revival of it in its ancient lustre.

There is, however, one illustrious exception to all that has been said of the selfish and the speculative tendencies of the poets of the present day, in

‘ The minstrel who called forth  
The new creation of a magic line,  
And, as the Ariosto of the North,  
Sung ladye-love and war, romance and knightly worth.’

He is, in every sense, a social and a national poet ; not only as an antiquary bringing to light the long forgotten minstrelsy of his country, but as a poet breathing its full spirit into his own compositions, and renewing in them the ancient glories of Scottish chivalry. In the productions of the author of *Waverley*, we find the same national and romantic spirit, indeed of a more truly dramatic cast, that, like Shakspeare’s, enters into all the floating prejudices, the faded superstitions, no less than the enduring elements of nature and character ; and if he does not equal the divine dramatist in that profound philosophy, which in the exhibition of human magnificence, shows us also its hollow vanity, he perhaps surpasses him in a sort of worldly good natured shrewdness,\* which sees through and avails itself of the hypocrisies and follies of mankind ; and if he is inferior to his inimitable prototype in his dominion over an invisible supernatural world, it must be granted, that in more than one instance, (in the gipsy Merrilies and in *Norna the Reim-kennar*,) he has carried local superstitions as far as the scepticism of the time would allow, showing himself deeply sensible to the gloomy beauties of the popular traditions of the North. But as it is not our purpose to run a parallel between Shakspeare and the author of *Waverley*, we will only add, that if the British drama is to be reinvigorated in its decrepitude, we know of no poet so likely to work this renovation, as he who is every day, in his prose compositions, exhibiting the drama of real life, clothed in all the sentiment and voluptuous imagery of poetry.

We have not meant to intimate, in the course of this long

\* The best examples of this, which now occur to us, are Pleydell, the Scottish barrister, and Edie Ochiltree, in the ‘*Antiquary*.’ It is a cast of character, however, to be met with more or less in all these romances.

disquisition on the dramatic tendencies of the English character, that success in this path would be now best obtained by an imitation of the primitive models. These should be studied for their 'living portraitures' of character, the unchanging, established principles of nature, not for the fleeting irregularities of their costume and manner, which would be in no way adapted to the exigencies of the present age ;—indeed a drama founded exclusively upon them could hardly be considered more original or more natural, than the drama founded on the French models in the days of queen Anne, and could be looked upon only (as has been observed of similar imitations of an obsolete school,) as a sort of 'Modern Antique.'

The most meritorious tragedies of our own age are, in our opinion, the 'De Montfort' and 'Basil' of Miss Joanna Baillie, the 'Remorse' of Coleridge, and Byron's 'Marino Faliero,'—to which we may add, inferior to none, Croly's 'Catiline.' Most of these are wholly independent of the influence of French criticism, and bear many beauties of genuine English culture. The tragedies of Miss Baillie are professedly devoted, and in them, every thing is sacrificed to the development of a single passion. They are written in the freedom and fidelity of nature ; but, with all their veracity, they are somewhat prosaic, and wanting in the genuine glow of poetical expression. The 'Remorse' is a burst of mystical passion, and, directly the reverse of Miss Baillie, this high poetical fervor confounds all delicate discrimination of character. No man has painted in such visible coloring as Coleridge, the imaginative horrors of a dead and an invisible world. This intensity of a highly stimulated fancy can hardly fit him to copy the literal realities of life.

Of Byron we must in like manner remark, that the extravagance of his personal sensibility is better suited to solitude than to the bustling scenes of the drama. His beauties are the beauties of solitude, of lofty meditation and of moral sentiment,—of deep communion with nature, with his own heart, but not with men. Under the dead coloring of misanthropy, (or if not hatred, the contempt of their own species,) his heroes lose the variety of living character. His plots are also without interest, as they are generally carried on behind the scenes, and all we learn of the progress of the intrigue is from the mouths, not the actions of the *dramatis personæ* ; it is only in an occasional burst of passion, that we are reminded of

the adventurous genius of Byron ; and we wish to breathe with him once more

‘ The difficult air of the iced mountain’s top,  
To muse o’er flood and fell,  
With things that own not man’s dominion.’

Barry Cornwall, in his ‘*Dramatic Scenes*,’ has given several affecting pictures of sweet romantic passion and tender melancholy, in the vein of the old English poets ; a promise of excellence, that has since been defeated by his imbecile tragedy of *Mirandola*.

It is now time to introduce Mr Croly to our readers, though a very brief acquaintance with him is all we can afford them. The subject of his tragedy—the conspiracy of Catiline—is one that has been successively attempted by three great masters, and has failed in the hands of all,—a failure, which they have uniformly imputed to the unwieldly and uninteresting nature of the story, as a dramatic subject. Our poet, however, with more management, finding that he could not hope to accommodate himself to the history, determined to accommodate the history to him. For this purpose he has soberly endeavored to prove in his preface, that the character of Catiline, in *Salust*, is a mere rhetorical flourish, while that given of him by Cicero authorizes us to believe him to have been a lofty spirit, in whom vice and virtue contended for empire, but who was finally exasperated by misfortune and insult into open hostility with his country. Now this wresting of Cicero’s eloquence into a vindication of the character of his greatest enemy is an inexcusable perversion of known historical facts ; and if Mr Croly found it expedient to cut the story according to his tragedy, he would have done better to have premised, like Voltaire, ‘ the savans must not expect to find here the true history of Catiline’s conspiracy.’ The character of Catiline is conceived with great feeling, and is in the highest degree animated and poetical.

‘ A towering and deep-rooted strength of soul,  
That, like the oak, may shake in summer’s wind,  
But, stript by winter, stands immoveable.’

Public and private disappointments, divine auguries, the supplications of wife and friends, and lastly the death of an only son under the most exciting circumstances, successively provoke

him into undisguised rebellion against his country. In a conversation with the ambassadors of the Allobroges, who have entered into a secret correspondence with Catiline, he thus vehemently expresses himself in the metaphorical language of passion.

‘ The state is weak as dust.  
Rome’s broken, helpless, heartsick ! Vengeance sits  
Above her,—like a vulture o’er a corpse  
Soon to be tasted. Time and dull decay  
Have let the waters round her pillar’s foot ;  
And it *must* fall. Her boasted strength’s a ghost,  
Fearful to dastards ;—yet, to trenchant swords,  
Thin as the passing air ! A single blow,  
In this diseased and crumbling frame of Rome,  
Would break your chains like stubble.’

We can give no just notion of the merits of the piece by a few mutilated scraps, and we will therefore present our readers with one copious extract from the fifth act, all of it incomparably fine. Catiline is encamped with his army among the Appennines, on the eve of an expected battle with the Roman army. His wife Aurelia is with him.

‘ *Catiline.*

Secure the valley. Here we camp to-night.

(*They go out.*)

The dew falls heavy ; and the rising wind (*Alone*)  
Moans through the tree-tops like day’s funeral song.  
Would it were mine !—’Tis happier to be dead,  
Than, being what I was, be what I am.  
But I am rebel, and must stand to it !—  
The dead man’s pillow is not scared with dreams ;  
His day is haunted by no sadder sights  
Of visages, grown desperate in his cause ;  
His fever’s cold ; he has no heart-ache now ;  
Has no *ambition* !

(*Aurelia is seen in the tent.*)

How fares my noble dame ?

*Aurelia.*

Well, Catiline,

And yet—not well ! You saw the sun go down ?

*Catiline.*

Like all that went before.

*Aurelia.*

I thought the sun

Look'd like a warrior dying on the field,—  
That those red gashes of the stormy west  
Streak'd all with streams of gore !

*Catiline.*

Come forth into the air ! For thoughts like those  
Are medicin'd best by nature. (*She comes.*) Stand awhile.

*Aurelia.*

This sky's Ionian, not of Italy.

*Catiline.*

Night's galley's launch'd,—her cloudy sails are up,—  
Yon stars the new lit lamps upon her prow,—  
These perfum'd gusts, the breezes that swell out  
Her cloudy sails ;—and those small, whisper'd sounds,  
Thus dying sweet,—the airy surge's swells,  
That break before her slow and dusky stem.

*Aurelia.*

'Twas on a night like this I sail'd by Crete,  
When all the waves were lull'd with silver sounds,—  
And all the mountains moonlike with pale fires  
Of Cybele's altars. (*A chorus is heard.*) Hark !

*Catiline. (smiling.)*

Those are our minstrels.—'Tis thus soldiers hail  
The dark and frowning goddess of the night,  
To guard their pillows from all evil dreams ;  
For in their rudeness still lives ceremony.  
And well may they commend themselves to heaven,

(*Despondingly.*)

Who, flung to sleep in danger's iron grasp,  
May never welcome in another morn.

*Aurelia. (With impatience.)*

When do we march for Rome ?

*Catiline*

*You shall be safe !*

All is provided for. A troop to night  
Will see you through Etruria.

*Aurelia.*

Go ! to night !

Abandon you in your extremity !  
Am I your slave, Patrician ! I have stood  
Your equal from the first ;—have never turn'd  
From sorrow, toil, or danger, by your side :  
For I was Marius' daughter, and *your* wife !

*Catiline.*

Be wise ! The time is short. Go, *Roman* wife !  
A rebel's fortunes are upon my head !  
Our home must be the hill-tops and wild caves,—

Our canopy the forest's dripping boughs,  
 Our meal the berries, roots, and all strange food,  
 That famine wrings from the step-mother earth,—  
 Our rusty swords must be our health, wealth, hope,  
 Our life be battle, flight, and stratagem,  
 Till all is buried in a bloody grave!

*Aurelia.*

Misfortune is a fire that melts weak hearts,—  
 But makes the firmer *fire*.—Here will I die!

*Catiline.*

I have had warnings.—In my last night's sleep,  
 I thought I saw myself, and *you*, and all,  
 Flung in one general tomb!

*Aurelia.*

A dream! no more.

An undigested grape will do as much.—  
 It was the battle,——'twas the day's turmoil  
 That left its heavy traces on your brain.

*Catiline.*

Perhaps so ;—for, in truth, I've been, of late,  
 Strangely beset, and sunk into the prey  
 Of midnight hauntings ;—not a passing wind—  
 A cloud—the shadow of a shaken bush—  
 But makes its mark upon my broken mind.  
 My sleep has grown a round of horrid things,  
 Terrors and tortures, that the waking sense  
 Quivers to think of.—Sometimes I am hurl'd  
 From mountain tops, or hung, by failing hands,  
 To precipices, fathomless as hell ;—  
 Sometimes, engulf'd in the outrageous sea,  
 And down its depths sent strangling, then flung loose  
 As many leagues aloft, above the moon,  
 To freeze along the deserts of the sky ;—  
 Sometimes, in hot encounter with the foe,  
 I feel a sudden javelin in my heart,—  
 And then I'm crush'd by heaps of dying men—  
 And hear the battle turning o'er my head—  
 And, fainting, *strive* to shout ;—then, in this death,  
 See spirits—and plunge downwards,—till I wake,  
 Madden'd and blinded, thinking all around  
 A remnant of my tortures ;—and thus, night  
 Is lost to me,—and sorrow's comfort, sleep,  
 Is made *my* agony.

*(Cecina enters, pale and wounded.)*

*(Catiline suddenly turns.)*

What brings that spectre here? Vanish, or speak!

*Cecina.*

My lord, I am——*Cecina!*

*Catiline.*

Mighty Jove!

What mist was on my eyes?—He bleeds to death!—  
Within there! *(Calls.)*

*Cecina.*

By and by,—I bear ill news.

*Catiline.*

Tell it at once; if we had hearts to break  
By piteous tales, we had not lived till now.

*Cecina.*

You are *undone!*

*Catiline. (fiercely.)*

I know it,—banish'd,—robb'd—  
A price set on me,—hunted to the grave,—  
But yet not *fang'd*—not *dead!*

*Cecina.*

Your friends in Rome—

*Catiline.*

Have they been brought to trial? One day more,  
And they shall see me at their prison gates,  
Laying their sentence on their sentencers.

*Cecina.*

My lord, your friends, last night, were—sacrificed!

*Catiline.*

What,—dead?—*all dead?* *(he covers his head with his robe.)*  
And I was lingering here!

*Cecina.*

This hour they lie, each in his cell, a corpse!

*Catiline.*

Sound all to arms! *(A flourish of trumpets.)*  
Call in the captains,—

I would speak with them!—

*(The officer goes.)*

Now, Hope! away!—and welcome, gallant death!  
Welcome, the clanging shield, the trumpet's yell,—  
Welcome, the fever of the mounting blood,  
That makes wounds light, and battle's crimson toil  
Seem but a sport,—and welcome, the cold bed,  
Where soldiers with their upturn'd faces lie—  
And welcome, wolf's and vulture's hungry throats,  
That make their sepulchres!—We fight to-night.'

They fight,—and Catiline falls in the arms of victory!—  
*New Series, No. 13. 20*

splendid catastrophe, and far superior to that of Ben Jonson's tragedy.

Much fault may be found with the fourth act, and with the religious mysteries of the Allobroges, as in no way essential to the development of the plot. But the lyrical beauties of the latter episode reconcile us to it in the closet, however it might weary us on the stage. The piece moves throughout with the elasticity and freedom of the old English school, and glows with the fervent coloring of a fancy touched with tender sentiment and natural imagery. The character of Catiline, especially,

‘ Armed with a glory high as his despair,’

rises into the sublimity of moral grandeur ; and in the extract we have given our readers, he moralizes on his gloomy situation, and welcomes coming death in a rich tone of pensive melancholy, that brings to mind the dying glories of Macbeth.

It is somewhat singular that Jouy should also have founded his tragedy of Sylla on the character of him not vulgarly received. In his preface he has drawn an ingenious parallel between him and Napoleon, implying that both were influenced more or less in their political conduct by patriotic motives. The part of Sylla is moreover played by Talma, who has some personal resemblance to the late emperor, and the portrait of the tragedian in the frontispiece is cut exactly into the physiognomy of Bonaparte, all which, connected with the sentiments put into the mouth of Sylla throughout the piece, is, without doubt, the most impudent thing we have known in France since the return of the Bourbons. But this is not our affair. The French dramatists, from the very principles on which their theatre is constructed, are, necessarily, all of them critics, and Mons. Jouy, in his preface, after premising, (as usual,) the immense interval between the French drama, and that of every other people in Europe, and that his own nation are the only pupils of the Greeks, proceeds to point out one or two slight deficiencies in the dramatic productions of his countrymen,—among others a total inattention to nice delineation of character. In opposition to this, our author has been very intent upon the development and full exposition of the character of Sylla, which he has done in a masterly manner, according to the interpretation of it, which he has assumed. Inflexible in his severities, yet chiefly out of a regard for the public weal,—with a profound



contempt for man, as an individual, yet with a sincere attachment to his country,—he exclaims in his hesitation at adding another name to the list of his proscriptions.

‘Que m’importe après tout l’existence d’un homme ?  
Je n’ai vu, je ne vois que le salut de Rome ;  
Nul intérêt privé n’excite ma rigueur ;  
C’est pour venger les lois, que je suis dictateur.’

The plot is feeble and uninteresting. It turns chiefly on the proscription of a noble Roman, and an abortive conspiracy of the proscribed party against the person of Sylla, which at last is determined by his voluntary abdication of the sovereign power ; a catastrophe not very tragical, certainly, but as much so as that of Corneille’s *Cinna*, to the mechanism of which play this bears considerable resemblance ; indeed quite as much so as many of the best French tragedies, which in more than one instance have tapered off into a swoon, or a separation of lovers.

The regard paid in the general construction of this play, to the inviolable laws and constitution of the French theatre (notwithstanding a deviation in a few unessential particulars, which, however, has drawn forth not a little vituperation from the Parisian critics,) is another evidence, that, from the causes before enumerated, there can be no reasonable expectation, that the French drama will assume any other shape, or adopt a more liberal system, than it derived originally from the national character.

The *Catiline* of Croly, on the other hand, is an evidence of a return to the free and natural vein of the elder English theatre ; and both of them, derived as they are from subjects in ancient history, exhibit in a strong but fair light, the peculiar genius of the two national dramas. In *Sylla*, where every thing proceeds with measured propriety, the *Unities*, at least those of time and place, are observed with a severity that produces an improbability in the identity of the latter ; in *Catiline* they are outraged to a degree, that two or three episodes are admitted into the body of the piece. The language in *Sylla*, brilliant and rhetorical, flows in an even tide of lofty eloquence ; the sentiments, of a cold, general nature, suggested rather by the understanding than the heart, exciting rather surprise or admiration, than deep interest or sympathy. In the English play, the language is broken into variety, but on the whole uncommonly melodious, and filled with sweet rural imagery ; the sentiments

tender or violent, but always of a passionate character, gushing warm and unsolicited from the heart. Sylla, so much superior to French characterization in general, presides over the whole scene with a stern, imperturbable serenity, that seems to control every thing by the terror of his frown. Catiline, on the other hand, tossed by conflicting passion, sets the elements in motion, and moves triumphant in the storm.

The events in the French play are feebly developed ; the intrigue shuffles on in an indistinct, unexciting manner, and terminates in a bloodless *denouement* of a calm and imposing majesty—the abdication of Sylla. The conspiracy in Catiline is matured before the eyes of the spectator, (although its development is not equal to that of most good English tragedies,) and, in the last act, expanding into a vein of sublimity and pathos, it hurries on to a bold and sanguinary catastrophe—the victory and death of Catiline.—The Genius of French tragedy should be personified by a marble statue, in the cold severity of sculpture ;—the Genius of English tragedy, in the warm and varied coloring of the canvass ; the former with a composed and elevated aspect, in the well defined and delicate proportions of art ; the latter in the shifting hues of passion, and the flexible graces of nature.

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ART. VIII.—*A complete history of the United States of America, embracing the whole period from the discovery of North America down to the year 1820. By Frederick Butler, A. M.* Three vols. 8vo.

SEVERAL of our readers may recollect, like ourselves, that two or three years since a subscription paper for this work was offered them. Wisely to prevent all cavil, a specimen of the work was exhibited with the subscription paper. This specimen was a bound octavo volume of the common size, consisting, if we remember, of about *forty* printed pages, and the rest of the volume *fair blank paper*. The strongest assurances were given, that the work should not be inferior to this specimen ; and we must say we think that these assurances have not been verified. Three decently bound *blank books* would have been by no means without value. The printing in these volumes, while it has ruined the paper for any other use, is itself nearly